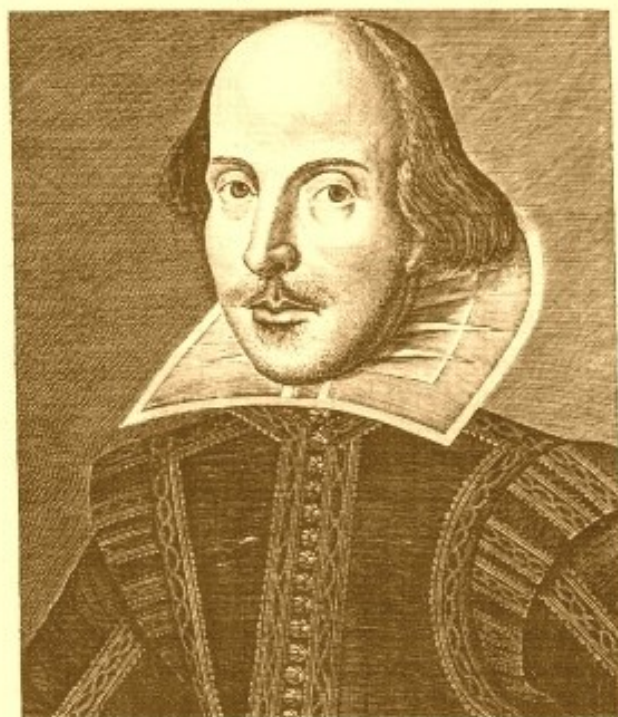


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to Modern English - for contemporary
readers and performers
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Shakespeare For White Trash: King John

Classic literature translated into Modern English by Crad Kilodney

October 7, 2010 – Author’s Note:

“Shakespeare For White Trash” is a series of condensed rewrites designed to make Shakespeare understandable and enjoyable to those who have little or no knowledge of him. The plots and characters are unchanged, but everything else has been radically restyled. Read my versions and you’ll be a Shakespeare fan forever!

These plays are intended to be performed, as well as read.

Main Characters

King John — King of England

Queen Eleanor — John’s mother; widow of Henry II. (Her spelling may vary)

Arthur — John’s nephew, by his brother Geoffrey

Constance — Arthur’s mother

Prince Henry — son of John

Bigot, Essex, Pembroke, Salisbury — English lords

Robert Faulconbridge — son of Sir Robert Faulconbridge; half-brother of Philip Faulconbridge

Philip Faulconbridge (The Bastard) — illegitimate son of Richard the Lion-Hearted. (His speech prefix will start as Philip Faulconbridge and then switch to Bastard. After he is knighted as Sir Richard Plantagenet, he will be addressed by others as Sir Richard.)

Lady Faulconbridge — mother of Robert and Philip

Hubert — citizen of Angiers and (later) attendant to King John

King Philip — King of France

Louis — Crown Prince (also called the Dauphin) of France. (In some texts the spelling is Lewis, which is strictly an English spelling, however. The speech prefix in other texts is Dauphin, but I prefer Louis.)

Duke of Austria — allied to France. (In some texts he is referred to as Lymoges.)

Cardinal Pandulph — the Pope's legate, or representative. (Spelling may vary.)

Chatillion — French ambassador

Blanche — John's niece, by his sister Eleanor. (Blanche's spelling may vary.)

Count Melun — French lord

Peter of Pomfret — a prophet

(James Gurney is deleted)

Gist of the story: Some historical context first. John was the youngest of five sons of Henry II, of the House of Plantagenet, so it is a fluke that he ever became King. (There were also three daughters, but they were not really in the order of succession.) Three sons — William, Henry, and Geoffrey — died young. Richard is the one who succeeded Henry II. This was Richard I, or Richard the Lion-Hearted (also referred to as Coeur de Lion or Cordelion). He went off to fight in a Crusade. John took advantage of his absence to proclaim himself Regent (substitute king) and heir to the throne, and many people resented this. If you remember Robin Hood from books, movies, or TV, you'll recall that there were occasional references to Richard, the good king, whom Robin Hood loved, and John, the bad king, whom Robin Hood regarded as a usurper. The bad king was supposedly going to be punished by the good king when he returned from the Crusade. Historically, however, Richard forgave John. Richard died in 1199 while fighting against the French, and that left John as King. However, theoretically, someone else was ahead of him in the order of succession, and that was Arthur, son of John's older brother Geoffrey. Shakespeare picks up the story shortly after 1200. (Please bear in mind that Shakespeare's historical plays are not necessarily accurate in all the details, since it was more important to deliver a good story than accurate history. For instance, the references to cannons in this play are wrong. Cannons weren't in use yet in Europe.) The French are backing Arthur's claim to the throne because they want to regain control of certain territories in France currently held by England. English and French forces confront each other at Angiers, France, fight to a stalemate, and then cut a deal: Prince Louis of France is married off to John's niece, Lady Blanche of Spain, and the French forget about Arthur. But then the Pope's legate, Cardinal Pandulph, shows up and excommunicates John over a dispute regarding the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The French King, Philip, is pressured into reneging on the peace agreement he has just made with John. The armies clash, the English get the better of it, and Arthur is captured and taken back to England. Pandulph goads the French into invading England on the dubious pretext of claiming the throne for Louis, since he is now married to Blanche. But Pandulph's real agenda throughout the play is to get England back under the authority of Rome. Arthur is imprisoned, and John orders his attendant Hubert to kill him. Hubert can't bring himself to murder the boy and gives John a false report that he has done so. Arthur tries to escape from the prison and dies in an accidental fall. Everyone is convinced John ordered him killed, and several lords are outraged and defect to the French. John patches up his differences with Pandulph and pleads with him to stop the French invasion. The French persist, but neither side is able to claim a victory. The English lords return when they find out that Louis intends to execute them once they've served their purpose. John is poisoned by a monk and dies. The lords now throw their support

to John's young son, Prince Henry, who is only mentioned now for the first time. Pandulph brokers a final peace treaty between the English and French. The play ends on a hopeful note, with the lords pledging loyalty to the child-king Henry.

(Historically, Henry was nine years old at this time and went on to rule as Henry III. Although he ruled for a long time, he was not a great king. The hero of Shakespeare's play is Philip the Bastard, who was not a historical figure but an invention of Shakespeare's. The Bastard, who is the son of Richard the Lion-Hearted, serves to articulate the theme of "Commodity", which is greedy self-interest. He starts out having a cynical respect for commodity, but by the end, he steadfastly puts honour first by pledging loyalty to young Prince Henry. Shakespeare does not elaborate on the political circumstances that put Henry on the throne, and I have resisted the temptation to "build out" Act 5 to emphasize them. But the reader should bear in mind the fickle loyalty of the English lords, Pandulph's agenda in behalf of the church, the interests of the French in having some ongoing influence with the new king, and the fact that Philip the Bastard probably could have usurped the throne for himself but instead sacrificed his own interests and supported Prince Henry, whose prospects and ability were completely unknown. *King John* is one of Shakespeare's least-known plays. It is rarely staged. And Shakespeare scholars don't regard it as a great play. However, there is a great story line here, and for Shakespeare, who had the best plots of any writer in the English language, *King John* was a historical figure too juicy to pass up. He was a terrible king, whose reign was marked by war and internal conflict. He is remembered chiefly as the signer of the Magna Carta — which he only signed because he was forced to by the enraged English barons. The Magna Carta, however, is not even referred to in the play. Neither are certain details of John's personal life. **This is the first modernized version of *King John* ever published.** I hope acting companies will now be encouraged to stage it more often. The entire series "Shakespeare For White Trash" is Shakespeare simplified and modernized by Crad Kilodney. It is designed to bring Shakespeare to the many millions of people who have little or no knowledge of him, and to prove to them that the stories contained in his plays are superb. Read my versions and you will become an instant Shakespeare fan. Enjoy!)

Act 1, Scene 1. *In the King's castle. King John, Queen Eleanor (his mother), the Lords Pembroke, Essex, and Salisbury, and the French ambassador Chatillion come in.*

King John: All right, Chatillion, what does your government want with me?

Chatillion: The King of France sends his greeting to the so-called King of England.

Queen Eleanor (Angrily): What do you mean, so-called?

King John: It's all right, mother. I want to hear what the so-called ambassador has to say.—Go on, Chatillion.

Chatillion: King Philip of France, in behalf of your nephew Arthur Plantagenet, claims the throne of England, which you stole from Arthur. The King of France demands that you relinquish the throne to Arthur, who is the rightful heir, being the son of your late brother Geoffrey.

King John: Ah. Really. And suppose I say no?

Chatillion: Then I'm afraid there will be war between France and England. My country will put Arthur on the throne by force, if that is necessary.

King John: Well, you can tell your King that he can sit on his thumbs and rotate.

(Chatillion is momentarily confused and then understands the insult.)

Chatillion: Oh!—*Quelle insulte!*

King John: Right. So get back in your rowboat and go report to your King. Tell him if he wants a fight, he can expect the worst from me. And don't look back, or you'll see our army right behind you.—Pembroke, escort the ambassador back to his boat.

(Pembroke nods and takes Chatillion out. Queen Eleanor goes to her son and speaks to him in a confidential tone. The audience must get the suggestion that she is a dominant mother who tells him what to do.)

Queen Eleanor: I told you this would happen. Arthur's mother, Constance, is behind this. I told you she would go to the French and get them on Arthur's side, and they would do it because of the territories they want to get back from us. You could have prevented this if you'd sweet-talked her a little.

King John: I've got the throne. That's all that matters.

Queen Eleanor: But Arthur has a claim, too. Geoffrey was older than you, so technically Arthur precedes you.

King John: I'm not interested in technicalities. Besides, he's just a kid.

(A Sheriff comes in and speaks aside to Essex.)

Essex: My lord, the Sheriff says that two young men are here to see you. They have a dispute.

King John: All right. Send them in.

(The Sheriff goes out. Then Robert Faulconbridge and Philip Faulconbridge come in.)

King John: And who are you?

Philip Faulconbridge: Your Majesty, I am Philip Faulconbridge, the eldest son of Sir Robert Faulconbridge—allegedly. Sir Robert served your brother, King Richard.

King John: Ah, yes. And who's this? *(Indicating Robert)*

Robert Faulconbridge: Robert Faulconbridge, your Majesty. I am the son and heir of Sir Robert.

King John: Huh!—Funny, you don't look like brothers. Maybe you have different mothers.

Philip Faulconbridge: No, my lord. The same mother. But as to my real father—you'd have to ask her.

Queen Eleanor: Oh! Shame on you! What a thing to say about your mother!

King John: That's my mother—Queen Eleanor.

Philip Faulconbridge: Madam, it wasn't I who raised the issue. My brother raised it. He's the one who's insisting that I'm—what's the word?—a bastard. He wants to take my inheritance. It's worth five hundred quid a year to him.

King John: Ah, so that's it. I hear that a lot. Not from the poor, of course. They aren't fussy about paternity. But when there's money involved—ha, ha!—So, then, Philip Faulconbridge, tell me straight. Was Sir Robert your father, or not?

Philip Faulconbridge: He was not, sir—as you can tell by our faces. And that's fine with me, because I certainly wouldn't want to look like him. *(Indicating Robert)*

Queen Eleanor (Aside to King John): He looks so much like Richard, don't you think?

King John: Yes. He does.

Robert Faulconbridge: Your Majesty, when my father was alive, your brother King Richard made good use of him—

Philip Faulconbridge (Butting in): Even better use of my mother.

Robert Faulconbridge: Ahem—Your Majesty, King Richard employed my father in important matters of diplomacy. My father was away in Germany, and King Richard stayed at our house. And—well—I don't want to talk about what actually happened—

King John: How could you? You weren't even born yet.

Robert Faulconbridge: No, sir. But my father told me before he died that King Richard was the real father of Philip. And my father left everything to me in his will. So that's why I'm here, sir—to ask you to uphold my rightful claim.

Philip Faulconbridge: I'm older, so I'm the rightful heir.

Robert Faulconbridge: But you're illegitimate.

King John: Well, now, not so fast. Your father raised him and accepted him like his own son, didn't he?

Robert Faulconbridge: Well—yes, my lord.

King John: He never hid him away, did he? Never said anything, did he?

Robert Faulconbridge: No, my lord.

King John: Even if my brother Richard fathered him, so what? These things happen. Your parents were married when he was born. I don't have a problem with it.

Robert Faulconbridge: But my father's will, sir—

Philip Faulconbridge: He had as much will to disown me as he did to beget me.

King John (Laughing): A spunky fellow!

Queen Eleanor: Tell me, young Philip. If you had a choice between being the landed heir of Sir Robert or the son of King Richard with no lands at all, which would you choose?

[Author's note: From this point on Philip's speech prefix will be "Bastard", following the example of the Folger Shakespeare Library edition. Other editions, such as Signet Classic, use "Bastard" from the very beginning.]

Bastard: Madam, that's a no-brainer. I'd choose to be King Richard's son any day.

Queen Eleanor: I like your answer, Philip Faulconbridge. Would you be willing to give up your inheritance to your brother and join us in a war against France?

Bastard: Madam, as the son of your son, I would follow you into hell if I had to. *(To Robert)* Go ahead. Take everything. *(To the King and Queen)* To you, sir—and to you, madam—I pledge my everlasting loyalty.

King John: What a fine fellow!

Queen Eleanor: He's Richard's son, all right.

King John: Now, then, good fellow Philip Faulconbridge, kneel before me.

(The Bastard kneels, and King John taps him on the shoulder with his sword.)

King John: I dub you Sir Richard Plantagenet, knight of England.—Arise.

(The Bastard stands up.)

King John (To Robert): Well, then, Robert Faulconbridge, I trust that you are satisfied with this resolution.

Robert Faulconbridge: Yes, your Majesty.

(The Bastard shakes hands with his brother.)

Bastard: Good luck, brother.

Robert Faulconbridge: Good luck to you, too.

King John: And now, lords, let's get ready for war with the French.

(The King leads everyone out except the Bastard, who lingers.)

Bastard: Well! A knight! How do you like that! Now I get to rub shoulders with the movers and shakers. Learn their ways. Learn what they know. All their polite manners, all their smooth words, all their refined tastes. Nobody has to know I'm poor. I can fake it. It's all about appearances.—Sir Richard Plantagenet—I like the sound of that. *(He has an imaginary encounter.)* What? Who are you calling a bastard? I am Sir Richard Plantagenet, son of King Richard the Lion-Hearted. *(Draws his sword)* How many pieces shall I cut you into?—Ha, ha, just kidding. I don't kill white trash. Just get

out of my my sight, okay? (*Puts his sword away*) I'm going to learn all the things that the powerful people know. Not to abuse anyone, mind you. Just to make sure nobody abuses me.

(*Lady Faulconbridge comes in. [James Gurney is deleted from this scene.]*)

Bastard: Mother!

Lady Faulconbridge: What has Robert been saying about me?

Bastard: Robby? You mean the son and heir of old Sir Robert?

Lady Faulconbridge: You are his son, too.

Bastard: Oh, am I? Which part of me is his? (*He points to different parts of his body.*) Are these his eyes? His nose? His ears? Is this his chin? How about these arms—and legs? Is this his figure?—Come, now, mother, you mustn't lie to me.

(*Lady Faulconbridge is painfully silent and then speaks with much difficulty.*)

Lady Faulconbridge: Um—your father—what I mean is—King Richard was your father. He was staying in the house while Sir Robert was away. And he—I didn't want to, but—you see—he was so persistent—he seduced me.—I—I just gave in.—I couldn't help it—that's all.—I'm so ashamed. I can imagine what you must think of me now.

Bastard (Cheerfully): You're wrong. What guy wouldn't want a king for a father? I'd say you did me a great favour.

Lady Faulconbridge: Do you really think so?

Bastard: Of course. I'm very proud to be the son of King Richard the Lion-Hearted. And—I am now a knight.

Lady Faulconbridge: A knight? Have you been knighted?

Bastard: Yes. By the sword of King John. I am now—Sir Richard Plantagenet.

(*He takes his mother by the arm and walks her out.*)

Act 2, Scene 1. *France. Before the gates of the town of Angiers. King Philip, Louis the Dauphin (Crown Prince), Constance, Arthur, and their Attendants come in from one side. The Duke of Austria and his Attendants come in from the other side. Austria is wearing a lion skin. [Arthur is in his early teens.]*

King Philip: Duke of Austria! Right on time!

Austria: King Philip! Wonderful to see you!—So this is Angiers.

King Philip: Yes. Nice, little town—even though it's English.

Austria: What's that slang name you call them—*maudits Anglais*?

King Philip: Shh! Not so loud. They don't like that—ha, ha. *(To Arthur)* Arthur, this is the man who killed your uncle, King Richard. And now he's come to help us put you on the throne of England.

Arthur (To Austria): I forgive you, sir. And I appreciate your coming here to help us.

Louis: You see, Arthur? Everyone loves you.

Austria: And I most of all, Arthur. I promise you I will not go home until we have beaten those bloody English bastards—um, that is, those who are your enemies—and made you King Arthur.

Constance: As his mother, I thank you so much.

Austria: It is a fine work that we do. And we do it for honour! For principle!

(Attendants mumble "Hear! Hear!")

King Philip: Indeed! And this where we will begin—Angiers. These are stubborn people, believe me. But a few well-placed cannon shots should persuade them to acknowledge Arthur as their rightful King.

Constance: My lord, shouldn't you wait for your ambassador, Chatillion, to return from England? Perhaps it won't be necessary to fight.

King Philip: Eh?—Oh, yes, I suppose.

(Chatillion comes in.)

King Philip: Ah, here he is!—So how did it go, Chatillion? What did King John have to say?

Chatillion: My lord, he said you should sit on your thumbs and rotate.

King Philip: Eh? What's that mean?

(Austria whispers in his ear.)

King Philip: What the devil! That son of a bitch!

Chatillion: My lord, forget about Angiers. The English army is on its way. And that mother of his, Queen Eleanor, is a bloodthirsty bitch. She wants to fight, too. And she's got her niece, Lady Blanche of Spain, who has her forces, too. And—a bastard son of King Richard. And all the English rabble who think they can make a buck out of a war. They'll be on us like a plague of locusts any moment.

(Sound of drums.)

King Philip: Good God!

Chatillion: I told you.

Austria: Hell, I thought I'd have time for a coffee and a croissant.

(King John comes in with the Bastard, Queen Eleanor, Blanche, Pembroke, and others.)

King John: King of France! This is English territory. If you dispute it, then it's war.

King Philip: Peace or war, it's up to you. Our grievance with you is that you have stolen the throne from this boy, Arthur, the son of your late brother Geoffrey. This land that you call English is rightfully his, and all of England, too.

King John: And why is any of this your business?

King Philip: God himself has moved me to support Arthur. I do it from the purest motives—faith, honour, and principle!

(French Attendants mumble "Hear! Hear!")

King John: So you would usurp the throne of England, would you?

King Philip: You are the usurper.

Queen Eleanor: No, you are.

Constance: What! Your son stole the throne from Arthur!

Queen Eleanor: Oh, shut up! You want him on the throne so you can be the Queen Mother. He's a bastard anyway.

Constance: Bastard? Bastard? What are you accusing me of? My husband, Geoffrey, was your son, and I was always faithful! But I don't think you can say the same. I always wondered whether Geoffrey was legitimate or not.

Queen Eleanor (To Arthur): Do you hear that? Listen to how your mother insults the good name of your father.

Constance (To Arthur): There's your grandmother! She's the one keeping you off the throne of England.

Austria: Stop it, both of you!

Bastard (Sarcastically): Oh! The Duke of Wienerschnitzel speaks!

Austria: What? Who the hell are you?

Bastard: I'm the guy that's gonna kick your ass in a minute. That lion skin you're wearing belonged to King Richard.

Blanche: That's why they called him Richard the Lion-Hearted. He killed that lion.

Bastard (To Austria): Why don't you have a robe made of chicken feathers. It would suit you better.

Austria: Of all the nerve!—King Philip, what should I do with this guy?

King Philip: Okay, everyone just calm down. Just cool it, all right?—John, here's what we want. Arthur gets the throne of England, including Ireland, and the territories in France.

King John: Ha! In your dreams! *(Sweetly to Arthur)* Arthur, now be a good boy. I'm your uncle. You come back to England, and I'll give you a lot more than the French will.

Queen Eleanor: Yes, Arthur. And grandma loves you, too.

Constance (Mimicking her): Grandma loves you, too! And she'll give you a nice plum, and a fig, and some cherries for being a good, little boy.

Arthur (On the verge of tears): Please, mother! I don't want to be in the middle of all this fighting!

Queen Eleanor (To Constance): See how you're upsetting him? A fine mother you are!

Constance: Me? You're the one who's caused him all this grief!

Queen Eleanor: Oh! The devil should rip out your tongue for all your lies!

Constance: He should take yours first—and your black heart to go with it!

King John: Stop it! I don't want to hear this!

Constance: Why did the plague come to England? Because of her! It was God's punishment for her wickedness!

Queen Eleanor: You foolish woman! I can show you Richard's will! He named John as his heir!

Constance: I'm sure it's in your handwriting!

King Philip: Enough of this!—These people here in Angiers are loyal to England. Let's see whom they prefer as King—Arthur or John. *(Calls)* Sound a trumpet to the people of Angiers.

(A trumpet sounds. Hubert leans over the wall. [In some editions, such as Folger, an unnamed citizen appears; in other editions, such as Signet, Hubert appears.])

Hubert: Who blows the trumpet for us?

King Philip: France!

King John: England—the country that loves you most!

King Philip: Good people of Angiers, hear our plea in behalf of Arthur, who would be your King—

King John: Don't listen to him. I'm already King. Now, look over there. You see all those French troops with all their cannons? They came here to destroy you. But we've come to save you from them. Don't trust the French. They're liars. Give me your support.

King Philip: No, no. He's the liar. We come for the sole purpose of upholding the claim of Arthur, the rightful heir to the throne. We want to be your friends. All we ask for is your support for Arthur. If you choose John, you'll be sorry. Now, what's it going to be, then?

Hubert: Angiers is loyal to the King of England—whoever it happens to be.

King John: Then open your gates to me. I am King.

King Philip: No, Arthur is.

Hubert: We won't open the gates to anyone until we know for sure who the King is.

King John: But look here. I'm wearing the crown. And look at all the lords and all the soldiers—

Bastard: And bastards.

King John: Eh?—Yes, all right. Them, too.

King Philip: We have just as many on our side who stand with Arthur.

Bastard: Including French bastards.

King Philip: What?

Hubert: You people settle the matter and then let us know. We're not stupid. We want to make sure we're on the winning side.

(A pause. King John and King Philip look at each other grimly.)

King Philip: Fine. We'll fight it out, then. All right?

King John: Suits me. I'll take my forces over to this side *(Indicates one side)*.

King Philip: Then I'll take mine to the other side *(Indicates the other side)*. In the name of God and our rightful claim, and all that is honourable and true!

King John: In the name of God, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and our rightful claim!

Bastard: Don't forget the bastards.

King John: Yes, them, too.

(Everyone leaves separately in two groups. Then the stage goes dim and there are flashes of light, sounds of cannons, drums, etc. After a minute, the battle stops, the stage returns to normal, and a French Herald appears before the gates and blows a trumpet.)

French Herald: Men of Angiers, open your gates to Arthur, for the French are victorious!

(An English Herald comes in with a trumpet.)

English Herald: Hey, fuck off. *(Blows his trumpet)* Men of Angiers, open your gates to King John, for the English are victorious!

(Hubert reappears at the wall. He looks left and right studiously.)

Hubert: We-l-l-l—You know, it's hard to say. It looks like a draw.

(The opposing Kings and their parties come in from opposite sides.)

King John (To King Philip): Well? Do you give up? I'd say we've beaten you.

King Philip: I don't think so. I'd say you got the worst of it. I'm prepared to keep fighting indefinitely.

King John: So am I. Your soil will be enriched by French blood.

King Philip: By English blood, more likely.

Bastard (Aside): These guys are both nuts. And these are the masters of the world?

King John (To Hubert): Well? Have you made up your minds yet?

Hubert: We support the King of England.

King John: That's what you said before.

Hubert: The situation hasn't changed, as far as we're concerned.

Bastard: My lords, may I say something?

King John: Yes?

Bastard: This town doesn't love either one of you, so why keep killing each other just to win them over? Why don't you join forces and get rid of this miserable town altogether. They're all assholes. Then, if you want to resume fighting each other, let Fortune decide who wins.

(A pause as the Kings consider.)

King John: That's a very wise suggestion, Sir Richard.

King Philip: Yes. I agree. How do you want to attack?

King John: We'll attack from the west side.

King Philip: I'll have my cannons shoot from the south.—Austria, you can shoot from the north, all right?

Austria: Yes, yes.

Bastard (Aside to the audience): The French brainiacs—firing from the north and south. They'll shoot each other.

Hubert: Uh—wait a minute! Hold on! *(Hubert disappears briefly and then returns.)* Hey, we love you both, okay? So we have a suggestion. *(To King John)* My lord, you have your niece here—Lady Blanche of Spain, daughter of your sister Eleanor. *(To King Philip)* And you, my lord, have your son here—Prince Louis, the Dauphin.—Why not marry them off and make peace? Then we can open our gates to both of you and have the wedding right here, and everyone will be happy. How's that?

King Philip: Let me confer with my son.

(King Philip and Louis move apart and confer confidentially. Constance takes Arthur by the hand and walks out, shaking her head and looking disgusted.)

Bastard (Smacks his forehead. Aside to the audience): What the hell was all this fighting for?

Queen Eleanor (Aside to King John): Do it. We'll give Blanche a good dowry to make the French happy, and you won't have to worry about the throne any more.

Hubert: Well? Is it a deal?

(King Philip and Louis return to the others.)

King John (To King Philip): We'll give you Volquesson, Anjou, Touraine, Maine, and Poitiers as Blanche's dowry.

Bastard (Aside): And Baltic Avenue and the Water Works.

King Philip (To Louis): Well, son? What do you think? Do you like her?

Louis: Yes. I like her a lot. She is the sun that casts my shadow.

Bastard (Aside): I think I'm gonna barf.

King John (To Blanche): Niece?

Blanche: Uncle, for your sake, I will agree. *(To Louis)* Prince Louis, I won't pretend that I do this for love. All I will say is that I don't have anything in particular against you.

Bastard (Aside to the audience): Now there's an endorsement.

King John (To King Philip): Tell you what. I'll throw in thirty thousand marks in gold.

Bastard (Aside): And a Get Out of Jail Free card.

King Philip: We like it. We accept. *(To Louis and Blanche)* Now join hands to show you agree.

(Louis and Blanche join hands. Attendants clap and cheer.)

King Philip (To Hubert): Now, then, citizens of Angiers, open the gates and we'll go straight to your church and get these two married at once.—Oh! Where's Constance? And Arthur?

Louis: I don't think she's very happy.

King Philip: Oh, dear. And we were supposed to—*(To King John)* John, what'll we do about Arthur?

King John: Oh, I'll give him a title. I'll make him Duke of Brittany—and Earl of Richmond. That should make him happy. Somebody should go after Constance and bring her to the church. I'll send one of my lords.

King Philip: Yes. All right.

(They all leave except the Bastard.)

Bastard (To the audience): Un-fucking-believable.—Honour! Principle! God! The Virgin Mary!—Oops, never mind. We'll do a deal. What a world! It's such a fucking crock. You know what I call it? Commodity. Everything's for sale. It's all about self-interest. It's all bullshit. Nothing really matters to the rich and powerful except wealth and power. It's all a game—like Monopoly.—So, okay, then. This is a lesson for me, right? I can be poor and curse the rich, or I can be rich and look down on the poor. Which would you choose? *(He pauses as if waiting for an answer.)* Right. Obviously.

(He leaves.)

Act 3, Scene 1. [*Author's note: This is either Act 3, Scene 1, or Act 2, Scene 2, depending on the edition. I am following the example of the Folger edition.*] *King Philip's tent. Constance, Arthur and Salisbury come in.*

Constance (Angrily to Salisbury): I can't believe it! They've cut a deal? Louis marries Blanche? And John stays on the throne? I think I'm going to be sick!

Salisbury: Don't be angry with me, madam. I'm just telling you what's happened.

Constance: I feel so betrayed. And my son, Arthur. This is treachery.

Arthur: Please, mother. Don't be upset.

Constance: You were meant to be King. It's all I think about, day and night. I live for nothing else.

Salisbury: Madam, please. They want you to attend the wedding.

Constance: No. I have my pride.

(King John and King Philip come in, with Louis, Blanche, Queen Eleanor, the Bastard, Austria, and Attendants. [The marriage has already taken place.])

Constance (To King Philip): What have you done to me! And to Arthur! I trusted you!

King Philip: Lady Constance—please. Have I not given you my word of honour as the King of France?

Constance: What word of honour? Where is the honour? I've been duped. My husband must be turning over in his grave. I pray to God to punish you—

Austria: Please, madam! This is for peace. Don't you understand?

Constance: I don't want this kind of peace! I want war!

Austria: Madam! Shame on you!

Constance: No! Shame on you, Austria! You wear Richard's lion skin, but you're not half the man he was. You're a coward. You swore to help me and Arthur, and you've gone back on your word. Better you should wear the skins of rabbits!

Austria: If you were a man, I'd strike you for such an insult.

Bastard: Better you should wear the skins of rabbits.

Austria: What!—How dare you!

King John: Stop! *(To the Bastard)* You keep quiet.

(Pandulph comes in.)

King Philip: Cardinal Pandulph! What a surprise!

King John: Your Eminence, welcome.

Pandulph: Greetings.—King John. I come in behalf of His Holiness Pope Innocent. He is very displeased, I'm sorry to say, and he demands to know why you refuse to appoint Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury.

King John: Oh, the Pope demands to know, does he? Well, I don't take orders from the Pope—or any other wop priest.

Pandulph: What!—How dare you!

Bastard (Aside to the audience): He's another one.

King John: Your boss is a corrupt bastard.—*(To the Bastard)* No offense. *(The Bastard shrugs.)*—So go back and tell His Ugliness not to meddle in English affairs. I will appoint who I damn well please.

King Philip: King John, you are talking blasphemy.

Pandulph: Blasphemy, indeed.—King John, by the authority granted to me by His Holiness, I hereby excommunicate you as a heretic. And I bless any man who kills you.

Constance: Amen to that! And the King of France is now his friend.

Pandulph (To King Philip): Is that true?

King Philip: Well—yes.

Pandulph: Philip of France, you must break off with this heretic. I order you in the name of the Pope.

King Philip: But, you see, I—

Queen Eleanor: Don't do it, Philip.

Constance (To Queen Eleanor): Ha! There goes your peace treaty!

Austria (To King Philip): My lord, you should obey. Excommunication means damnation.

Bastard (Aside to the audience): Somebody write that down.

Austria: What did you say?

Bastard: I wasn't talking to you.

(Austria looks toward the audience, perplexed, but sees nothing.)

Louis: Father, don't break off with King John. I might lose Blanche.

Constance: Louis! The devil is leading you astray—through her *(Indicating Blanche)*.

Blanche: Madam, you are speaking from self-interest, not religious faith.

Constance (To King Philip): I have faith, and so do you, my lord. You wouldn't violate your faith, would you?

(King Philip hesitates.)

King John (Sternly): Philip? We had a deal. Kings don't break their word.

Constance (To King Philip): Break off with him now!

Austria: Yes, my lord. You should.

King Philip: I don't know.—If I just had more time to think—

Pandulph: In hell you will have time enough to think about your mistakes.

King Philip: But, your Eminence, put yourself in my place. England and I have just made peace. Prince Louis has just married Lady Blanche. There would have been all-out war otherwise. Surely you can understand the situation. Surely there's some other course you can take that will allow us to keep this peace.

Pandulph: There is no compromise with heresy, good sir. To stand with the heretic is to be one yourself. England has made itself an outlaw to the church. And it is France that must take up arms to defend the church against heresy.

King Philip: But I have given my word.

Pandulph: Your first loyalty is to the church. Any word given that goes against that loyalty may be broken. And it must be broken. You cannot be true to England and the church at the same time. If you choose England, you shall be excommunicated.

Austria: Yes. It would be rebellion against the church.

Bastard: Oh, fuck off.

Louis: Father, I think the Cardinal is right. We must be true to the church and take up arms against England.

Blanche: No, Louis! You mustn't! We're married!

Constance: Don't listen to her, Louis! This is God's will!

Blanche: Now I get to see what sort of a man I married.

Constance: For your faith, Louis! Think of faith!

Louis: Father?

(King Philip, very grim, turns away from King John.)

King Philip: Very well. I break my tie to England.

Constance: Thank God!

Queen Eleanor: You fickle Frenchman!

King John: King of France, we could have been friends. You will regret this.

Blanche: And where do I go now? No matter which side wins, I lose.

Louis: You'll stay with me.

Blanche: And die.

King John (To the Bastard): Gather our army.

(The Bastard leaves.)

King John: France, I am so angry, the fire inside me can only be quenched by French blood.

King Philip: Let your anger burn, then—and burn England to ashes! You dig your own grave.

King John: You're holding the shovel. Dig yours first.

(All leave, in two groups separately.)

Act 3, Scene 2. *A battlefield near Angiers. Sounds of battle. The Bastard comes in holding Austria's head.*

Bastard (Looking up at heaven and showing off the head): Hey, dad! King Richard! I got the fucker! The Duke of Austria!

(King John, Arthur, and Hubert come in.)

King John: Ha! Ha! The head of Austria! Well done, Sir Richard Plantagenet!

Bastard: Do I get to keep it, my lord?

King John: Why not?—Hubert, you keep Arthur close to you at all times.—Sir Richard, take some men and check on my mother. I'm a little worried about her.

Bastard: There's no need, my lord. I've already made sure she's safe. We've almost got the French beat. We should press the attack.

King John: Yes, yes. Come along.

(They all leave.)

Act 3, Scene 3. *[Author's note: This scene break does not occur in all texts. I am following Folger's example and putting it in.] The battlefield. Alarms of retreat by the French. King John comes in with Queen Eleanor, Arthur, the Bastard, Hubert, and Lords. Arthur is very upset.*

King John: Mother, I'll leave you here in charge of our French territories. You'll be well-protected.

(To Arthur) Now, now, Arthur, don't be frightened. Don't cry. I'll take care of you. We're going back to England.

Arthur: What about my mother? She'll die of grief without me.

King John: Don't worry. It'll just be a temporary separation. Your Uncle John will take good care of you—just as if you were my own son. *(To the Bastard)* I've got a job for you. I want to go on ahead of us and go to all the abbeys. Those monks all have cellars full of gold. I want you to collect as much as you can haul away to pay for this, uh, hunting party. Know what I mean?

Bastard: Extort money from the church? Great idea, sir. Damnation doesn't scare me.

King John: Ha, ha! Me neither!—Farewell, cousin. [*Author's note: In Shakespeare's English, "cousin" is a general term for a relative. In this play, it is used affectionately.*]

(The Bastard leaves. King John takes Hubert aside and speaks to him confidentially.)

King John: Hubert, you've done me a big favour getting your hands on Arthur. I won't forget it. You'll be well rewarded.

Hubert: Thank you, my lord. I anticipated you would want him close to you—to take care of him, of course.

King John: Heh, heh—of course. You're a smart fellow. You catch on fast. I know I could trust you with any sensitive business, couldn't I?

Hubert: Without question, my lord.

King John: From this point on, I'm putting you in charge of Arthur.

Hubert: Yes, my lord.

King John: He's a problem, you understand. He's in my way. If there was a snake in my path, you'd kill it, wouldn't you?

Hubert: Of course, I would, my lord.

King John: Good. This boy is a snake, Hubert. See what I'm getting at?

Hubert: Yes, my lord.

King John (Patting him on the shoulder): You'll be in for a big reward. *(To Queen Eleanor)* Mother, we're going now. I'll send you the troops you'll need.

Queen Eleanor: I'll keep everything under control, don't worry. Good luck, my son.

(The King hugs his mother briefly.)

King John (To Arthur): Come, Arthur. We're going to England. Won't that be exciting? You'll have lots of fun. And Hubert will be your personal servant. He'll be with you all the time.

(They all leave.)

Act 3, Scene 4. *In King Philip's tent. King Philip comes in with Louis, Pandulph, and Attendants.*

King Philip: I can't believe our rotten luck! I send out our fleet and it gets hammered by a storm!

Pandulph: Don't be discouraged, my lord.

King Philip: Don't be discouraged!—What else can go wrong? We lost Angiers. Arthur's a prisoner. And the English got away from us.

Louis: And their territories are all reinforced—and so quickly, too. It's amazing.

King Philip: Are they really that much better than us? Tell me.

(Constance comes in, disheveled and miserable.)

Constance: I hope you're satisfied. This what comes of trying to make peace with England.

King Philip: Now, Lady Constance, please. Try to be patient.

Constance: I have nothing left to live for. I pray for death to end my suffering.

King Philip: No, madam, you mustn't say that.

Constance: Death! Death! Death!—This widow is all yours. I'll make a wedding dress of thorns and soak it in blood.

Pandulph: Madam! You're speaking like an insane person.

Constance: Insane? Oh, no. If only I were. Then I wouldn't know what to grieve about. I lost my husband, and now I've lost my son. I'm sane enough to feel all this pain—and sane enough to think about ending it all.

King Philip: Lady Constance, I beg you. Have courage. We are all your friends.

Constance: I'll never see my boy alive again. I'll see him in heaven—and my dear Geoffrey.

Pandulph: Madam, such grief is un-Christian.

Constance: What do you know of grief? You've never had a wife or a son to lose.

King Philip: Madam, our hearts are with you, believe me. You must try to be brave.

Constance (Weeping): My poor Arthur! My only boy! Such a lovely boy! My only reason for living!

(She leaves.)

King Philip: Oh, Christ.—I'd better go after her and make sure she doesn't do anything stupid.

(He leaves with his Attendants, leaving Pandulph and Louis alone.)

Louis: I've never felt so bad in my entire life. Everything seems hopeless.

(Pandulph takes Louis by the arm in a paternal way.)

Pandulph: Ah, my young Prince, it is in our worst moments that we find our real strength. Now tell me, what have you actually lost today?

Louis: Everything—glory—happiness—everything.

Pandulph: Not so. Fortune has a way of disguising herself. When she means well, she looks threatening. And when she means ill, she smiles.

Louis: How do you mean?

Pandulph: King John thinks he has won, but in truth he is walking blindly toward a deep, dark pit.

Louis: He is?

Pandulph: Yes. Tell me, are you sorry that he has taken Arthur prisoner?

Louis: Of course.

Pandulph: Now, young Prince, listen carefully, for I can see far ahead of everyone else. I am seeing your path to the throne of England.

Louis: My path to—?

Pandulph: Shh—just listen and consider. King John has Arthur, but what will he do with him? As long as Arthur lives, he is a threat to John. Therefore, John will have to kill him.

Louis: Do you think so?

Pandulph: I'm sure of it. And Arthur's death will be to your benefit.

Louis: How?

Pandulph: You are married to King John's niece. Whatever claim Arthur has made to the throne of England, you can make just as easily.

Louis: I would end up the same way as Arthur.

Pandulph: Ah, Prince, you are still somewhat innocent to the ways of the world. King John will clear your path to the throne when he murders Arthur. The people will be outraged. His enemies will come out of the woodwork. They will look for any opportunity to get rid of him. And you will be the instrument of their rebellion.

Louis: But what if he doesn't kill Arthur?

Pandulph: He will when he finds out you're coming. He'll assume you're coming for Arthur's sake. The people will rise up against him. What do you think that bastard Faulconbridge is doing right now?

Louis: I don't know.

Pandulph: He's looting the monasteries to pay for King John's military expenses. Looting the church, my boy! Think of that! But if the French came to put a stop to it, everyone would rally to your side. Don't you see?

Louis: Yes.

Pandulph: Now, my good Prince, let's go have a word with your father. He'll see it my way. King John is a ripe apple ready to fall. You will be the next King of England.

Louis: Thank you, your Eminence!

(They leave.)

Act 4, Scene 1. *In King John's castle. A prison is suggested—a bare room with a chair. Hubert comes in with two Executioners holding a rope and an iron.*

Hubert: You heat that iron and hide behind the curtain. When I stamp my foot, you come out and tie the boy to the chair.

Executioner: I hope you have written orders for this.

Hubert: I have orders. You just do what I say.

(The Executioners leave.)

Hubert: Arthur! Where are you, boy?

(Arthur comes in. [Throughout this scene he is child-like and innocent.])

Arthur: Good morning, Hubert.

Hubert: Good morning, Prince.

Arthur: I don't feel like a Prince.—You look sad.

Hubert: Perhaps I am.

Arthur: I'm the one who should be sad. I miss my mother. I don't like this place. I'd just as soon trade places with some shepherd and be outside in the fresh air. I'm afraid of Uncle John. And I think he's against me. Just because I'm Geoffrey's son. I'd rather be your son. Then you'd love me. You would, wouldn't you?

(Hubert looks away, unable to respond.)

Arthur: You don't look well today. Shall I sit with you until you feel better? I don't mind at all.

Hubert: Arthur—I—You must read this. *(He thrusts a paper into Arthur's hand and looks down, very grim.)* Do you understand what I have to do?

(Arthur reads the death warrant. [The ensuing conversation must be done slowly, with pauses.])

Arthur: You're going to burn out my eyes with a hot iron?

Hubert: I've been ordered.

Arthur: And you're going to?

Hubert: I must obey your uncle.

Arthur: Would you really do that to me? Burn out my eyes? Did these eyes ever cast a mean look at you? Haven't I always been your friend? Didn't I stay up with you all night when you were sick? Didn't I bring you water, and hold your hand, and give you my own pillow? Haven't I always treated you as I would my own father?

Hubert: It's not because I want to. It's because I have to obey your uncle.

Arthur: Am I a criminal, that I must be tortured? I can't believe you would do this.

(Hubert stamps his foot. The Executioners appear with the rope and iron.)

Arthur: No! Hubert!

Hubert: Give me the iron. Tie him.

(He takes the iron. The Executioners begin to tie Arthur to the chair.)

Arthur: No! Hubert! Make them go away! If you have to do it, I'll stand still and let you do it yourself! I won't struggle!

Hubert (To the Executioners): I'll do it myself. You go.

Executioner: Gladly.

(The Executioners leave.)

Arthur: Is this how it ends between us?

Hubert: Be quiet. You're only making it harder for me.

Arthur: Shall I be quiet, too? Does my tongue offend as much as my eyes? Then perhaps you should cut it out first.

(Hubert is unable to reply. Arthur reaches out and grabs the iron.)

Arthur: It's gone cold.

(Hubert snatches it back.)

Hubert: I'll put it in the coals again.

Arthur: No, Hubert. The angels have made it cold—for the sake of my eyes—and your eternal soul.

(Hubert throws down the iron and covers his face and sobs.)

Arthur: Now are you my friend again, Hubert?

(Hubert collects himself.)

Hubert: Damned if I'll obey your uncle. To hell with him.

Arthur: Thank you, Hubert.

Hubert: He mustn't know, or it'll be the end of me. I'll tell him you're dead. Come on, I have to hide you someplace until I can figure out how to get you out of the castle.

(They leave.)

Act 4, Scene 2. *In the castle. King John comes in with Pembroke and Salisbury and sits on his throne.*

King John: Well! Now I feel better. Another coronation was just the thing to get around that excommunication. New pledges of loyalty just to make sure everyone's on board.—Right, Pembroke?

Pembroke: It was totally unnecessary, my lord.

Salisbury: Worse than unnecessary. It's potentially a source of trouble.

King John: How so?

Salisbury: People are wondering what's the reason for it. Their minds might be turning in the wrong direction.

King John: Oh, nonsense.

Pembroke: Listen to Salisbury, my lord. You should have left well enough alone.

Salisbury: Pembroke and I do our best to advise you, my lord, but you never listen.

King John: Oh, well, of course, I value your advice. Both of you. This second coronation was the right thing to do. I'm sure of it. In any case, please feel free to say whatever you think. Anything you think I should do. I'll listen.

Pembroke: My lord, speaking for all of us who have your best interests at heart, I sincerely recommend that you set Arthur free. There is a lot of talk going around concerning Arthur and his imprisonment. If your right to the throne is indisputable, then there's no reason for him to be locked up, now, is there?

King John: Well—if you put it that way—I suppose not.

Salisbury: And we would let it be known that you set him free on your own initiative, not because we advised you to.

(Hubert comes in. [Author's note: Editors disagree as to whether Hubert comes in now, or two lines from now, when King John addresses him. It's a subtle point that affects how we should take King John's next two lines. I'm choosing to follow Signet on this.])

King John: Oh—yes—of course. You can look after him.—Hubert? Did you have something to tell me?

(King John takes Hubert aside for some private words.)

Pembroke (Aside to Salisbury): That's his henchman. Hubert. A friend of mine told me he had a warrant from the King to kill Arthur. And from the look on his face, I think he's already done it.

Salisbury: The King looks guilty, too. This is going to be bad.

(King John returns to Salisbury and Pembroke.)

King John: Well—gentlemen—I have some grave news. It appears that young Arthur died last night—of an un—an unnat—a natural illness. A natural illness.

Salisbury (Ironically): Yes. We heard he was sick.

Pembroke (Ironically): Yes. We heard he was close to death—even before he knew he was sick.

King John: What—what do you mean by that?

Salisbury: We're not stupid. I hope you're proud of yourself. Goodbye, my lord.

Pembroke: I'm coming with you, Salisbury. We'll go look for the boy's grave—if we can find it. *(To King John)* This is going to end very badly for you, my lord. Goodbye.

(Salisbury and Pembroke leave. King John is very upset.)

King John: Oh, my God—what have I done?

(A Messenger comes in, looking frightened.)

King John: Do you have news from France?

Messenger: My lord, the French have raised an army. They're already on English soil.

King John: What! Why wasn't I told anything? What about my spies? What about my mother? Why didn't she warn me?

Messenger: My lord—I'm sorry, but—your mother has died.

King John: Died!—My mother!

Messenger: And I understand Lady Constance died shortly before her.

King John: I need time to think—time to think.—Everything just slow down for me—slow down.—My lands in France—must have been captured.—Who's leading the French army?

Messenger: Prince Louis, the Dauphin, my lord.

King John: Louis.—I'll bet Pandulph is behind this—that son of a bitch.

(The Bastard comes in with Peter of Pomfret.)

King John: Cousin! You're a sight for sore eyes. I've had nothing but bad news. Please don't give me any more. I couldn't take it.

Bastard: You can plug your ears if you want, my lord.

King John: Give me a moment. *(He takes a deep breath.)* All right. Tell me.

Bastard: Well, I hit up all the abbeys like you told me, and I collected a lot of money.

King John: Good.

Bastard: However—there are a lot of angry people out there. And there's a lot of strange stuff going on, too.

King John: Strange how?

Bastard: People have become very superstitious all of a sudden. Everywhere I went, I kept hearing a lot of talk about signs and omens. People are afraid. Of what, I don't know. They're listening to prophets—like this guy *(Indicating Peter of Pomfret)*.

King John: Who's he?

Bastard: He calls himself Peter of Pomfret. He was talking to a big crowd. He told them you would give up your crown on Ascension Day.

King John (To Peter, angrily): Is that so!

Peter: My lord, I look into the future, and that's what I see.

King John (To Hubert): Hubert, take this asshole and lock him up. On Ascension Day I'll have him hanged. Go now and come right back.

Hubert: Yes, my lord.

(Hubert takes Peter out.)

King John: You've heard the news about the French?

Bastard: It's all over the place.—Oh, by the way. I bumped into Lord Bigot and Lord Salisbury and a few others. They were looking for Arthur's grave. They were pretty angry. They said you had him killed.

King John: No, no, I—cousin, listen. You must go to them. I need to explain things to them. It's very important. Please bring them back.

Bastard: I'll go look for them.

King John: Do it quickly. I don't want my own people turning against me when I have the French to worry about.

Bastard: I'll go at once, my lord.

King John: Wait. Take this messenger with you in case you need him.

Bastard (To the Messenger): Come on, then.

(The Bastard and the Messenger leave. King John is alone for the moment. He looks up toward heaven in anguish.)

King John: Mother! Tell me what to do!

(Hubert returns.)

Hubert: My lord, there are strange portents.

King John: Eh?

Hubert: Five moons in the sky.

King John: What?

Hubert: People said there were five moons in the sky. Four were stationary, and the fifth moved around the others.

King John: It's rubbish! Don't believe it! People are idiots!

Hubert: Everyone is talking about Arthur's death. They say it's a bad thing. And now the French have come. They're in Kent—

King John: Shut up! I don't want to hear about the French! And I don't want to hear another word about Arthur! I had nothing to do with Arthur's death! You did it!

Hubert: On your orders, my lord.

King John: No!—No, I—I never ordered any such thing.—I don't remember what I said. Sometimes I say things but I don't really mean them. You should know me by now. Sometimes I get angry, that's all. But I never actually told you to kill him.

(Hubert produces the death warrant.)

Hubert: This is the death warrant for Arthur, my lord—in your handwriting and sealed with your seal.

(King John glances at it and knocks it to the floor.)

King John: It was a mistake! It was an impulse! It's because of you!

Hubert: Because of me, my lord?

King John: Yes! Your ugly face drove me to do it! You are ugly, you know. I always thought you were cursed. You look like a murderer. You really do. And I looked at you, and a thought flashed through my mind. I could get you to kill Arthur. It was a whim, that's all. I don't know what came over me.

Hubert: My lord—

King John: If you're so bloody loyal, why didn't you stop me, eh? Eh? But you didn't speak up. You could have, but you didn't. You deliberately let me make this mistake. And now look what's happened. The nobles have turned against me. And now the French are coming. This country is going to pieces! I'm going to pieces! All because that boy is dead!

Hubert: My lord, please listen. The French are the only thing you have to worry about. Arthur is alive.

King John: Alive? He's alive?

Hubert: Yes. You think I look like a murderer. Maybe I do, I don't know. But I'm not one. I would certainly never kill an innocent boy.

King John: Then—you didn't carry out—*(Indicates the warrant on the floor)*—that.

Hubert: No, my lord, I didn't. For once, I disobeyed you.

King John: Oh, thank God! Thank God!—Oh!—Oh!—You must go and tell everyone! Tell them it was all a misunderstanding! Tell them he's not dead! *(He pauses to calm himself.)* Hubert—I'm sorry for what I said. It was just—my mind—I—If mother were here, I—Oh, please just go talk to all the lords. You must. Every minute counts.

Hubert: Yes, I will, my lord.

(Hubert leaves.)

Act 4, Scene 3. *[Author's note: With apologies to Shakespeare, the story line has to be tweaked in this scene to make Arthur's death more properly accidental. In the original play, Arthur attempts to escape by jumping from the wall of the castle, believing he can make the jump. He dies from the fall. This is not at all credible, and Shakespeare has lost points for it. In this version, Arthur considers whether to jump and falls accidentally. Also, the Messenger is added to the scene to help Hubert carry Arthur's body. The Bastard took the Messenger along with him, so it is credible for him to appear here. Shakespeare's stage directions are also inadequate, as they apparently leave Arthur's body in plain sight for some time before he is noticed. My staging solution is a suggestion to the Director. The stage is dimly lit. Arthur is kneeling or standing on the wall of the castle, facing the wing. The wall spans most of the stage, and one corner of the wall is close to the wing. Arthur is near that corner, and he is sideways to the audience. This allows him to fall onto a cushion that the audience can't see. When he falls, his hand will stick out in front of the wall just a little. This way he will be inconspicuous and will only be noticed belatedly.]*

Arthur (Looking down): I have to get away from here.—I don't know.—That's a bit of a drop.—I wonder—
(*He is distracted by a wasp and swipes at it.*) Bloody wasp! Get away!—Oh!

(*He falls and dies. His hand is just barely sticking out at the front of the wall. Then Pembroke, Salisbury, and Bigot come in from the other side.*)

Salisbury: I'm going to meet Prince Louis at Saint Edmundsbury. We really have no choice. We have to go over to the French side.

Bigot: Yes, yes. We'll go with you.

Pembroke: Who brought you that letter from Pandulph?

Salisbury: Count Melun. He made it very plain that Prince Louis wants us to join him.

Bigot: We'll go tomorrow, then.

Salisbury: The sooner the better. It'll take us two days to get there.

(*The Bastard comes in with the Messenger.*)

Bastard: Ah, there you are—Salisbury—Pembroke—Bigot. I'm glad I found you.

Salisbury: Hello, Sir Richard.

Bastard: Are you guys still angry?

Salisbury: Yes.

Bastard: Look, the King wants you to come back. He wants to talk things over with you.

Salisbury: Not a chance. We're through with him.

Pembroke: We don't consort with murderers.

Bigot: That's right.

Bastard: Look, whatever it is you believe, at least give him a chance to explain.

Salisbury: We don't want to hear his lies. We've made up our minds. We're leaving him for good.

Bastard: Come on, now. You're gentlemen. You're lords. This is a time for reason and diplomacy. Don't let your feelings run away with you.

Pembroke: Our feelings are based on honour.

Bastard: Don't break off with the King. Please.

Salisbury: This is where Arthur was imprisoned. Perhaps we'll find—*(He notices the hand sticking out.)* Hold it. *(He goes over and looks around the corner of the wall.)* Pembroke! Bigot!

(All the others rush over. They pull Arthur's body forward into plain sight.)

Pembroke: My God!

Salisbury: Murdered.

Bigot: The poor boy. This is terrible.

Salisbury: Now what do you think of your beloved King, Sir Richard?

Bastard: I'm shocked. This is too horrible—if it really is murder.

Salisbury: If!—We expected something like this to happen. Hubert did it on the King's orders. And I swear to God they will both pay for this crime.

Pembroke and Bigot: Yes! Yes!

(Hubert comes in at the other side and doesn't notice Arthur's body.)

Hubert: My lords! The King wants to see you. Arthur is alive.

Salisbury (Drawing his sword): Murderer!

Bastard: No! Put that away!

Hubert: Lord Salisbury! What do you mean by this?

Salisbury (Indicating Arthur's body): Here's your boy!—Dead! Murdered!

(Hubert approaches.)

Hubert: I don't understand! He was alive when I saw him only an hour ago!

Pembroke (To Salisbury): Go on, kill him.

(The Bastard stands in front of Hubert and draws his sword to defend him.)

Bastard: No! There's not going to be any killing until we find out what really happened.

Bigot: You would defend a murderer?

Hubert: Lord Bigot, I swear to you I didn't kill Arthur!

Bigot: Then how did this happen? Someone killed him.

Hubert: I don't know what happened, but I swear to you I had nothing to do with it. I loved that boy.

(Salisbury puts his sword away.)

Salisbury: This crime will be punished—one way or another. *(To Pembroke and Bigot)* Come on, let's get away from this miserable place.

Bigot: We'll go straight to Louis right now.

Pembroke (To the Bastard): If the King wants us, we'll be at Saint Edmundsbury—with the Prince of France.

(The three Lords leave.)

Bastard: Well—Hubert—If you had anything to do with this—

Hubert: No! No! I didn't—

Bastard: If you killed this boy, you're the worst villain that ever walked the earth, and your soul will rot in hell.

Hubert: Sir Richard, you must believe me.

Bastard: I wish I could.

Hubert: Sir Richard, if I killed this boy, may the devil take me and torture me for eternity. I swear to you he was alive when I last saw him.

Bastard: All right. Pick him up.

(Hubert and the Messenger pick up Arthur's body.)

Bastard: That's England you're holding in your arms. He might have been King. All hell is going to break loose now. And I can't imagine how it'll end.—Come on. I have to get back to the King immediately.

(They leave.)

Act 5, Scene 1. *In the castle. King John stands with Pandulph and Attendants. King John is very pleased with himself and speaks directly to the audience, showing off.*

King John: Watch this, everyone! *(He takes off his crown. To Pandulph)* Cardinal Pandulph, I repent of my heresy and hand over my crown and acknowledge the supremacy of the church.

(He hands over the crown to Pandulph.)

Pandulph: King John, in the name of the Pope, I forgive your heresy and accept you back into the church. Your crown is returned, and you remain King of England.

(Pandulph gives back the crown.)

King John (Claps his hands once with delight): Oh! Great! *(He puts his arm around Pandulph and shakes him by the shoulder like a friend.)* And now that we're friends again, you'll tell the French to call off their invasion like you promised—right?

Pandulph: I will do my best. On this glorious holiday, Ascension Day, remember your obedience to the church. Now I go to the French.

(Pandulph leaves. King John stands there smiling for a moment. Then a frightened look crosses his face.)

King John: Ascension Day? Did he say Ascension Day?—Yes, this is Ascension Day. What did that guy Peter say?—I would give up my crown on Ascension Day?—Oh, but it was just for a moment. And it was voluntary. So it doesn't count. I'm okay, then. Never mind.

(The Bastard comes in.)

Bastard: My lord, Kent has gone over to the French, and so has London. *(King John groans.)* The lords won't speak to you. They've gone over to the French side. And there's so much confusion out there, frankly, I have no idea who's still on your side.

King John: But I sent Hubert to tell the lords Arthur is still alive. Why didn't they come back?

Bastard: Because they found Arthur dead—probably murdered.

King John: But Hubert told me Arthur was alive.

Bastard: It's possible that he was, for all Hubert knew.

(King John looks extremely troubled.)

Bastard: What's the matter, my lord?

King John: I don't feel entirely well.

Bastard: My lord, this is a time to be tough. The French are coming. You've got to face them. You've got to kick their butts.

King John: No, it's all right. There won't be any war. Pandulph was here. I've smoothed everything over with him. He's going to tell the French to go home.

Bastard: What!—You made a deal with that piece of shit? The French are already here on our soil! And guess who's leading them? That candy-assed Prince Louis, who never got his shoes dirty in his entire life. And what if Pandulph can't send them back? You're going to have to fight. And even if he does send them back, what'll people think? They'll think you cut a deal because you were afraid. No. Let them think it was the French who cut the deal because they were afraid. You've got to put up a show of force no matter what.

(King John is very perplexed. He sits down unsteadily.)

King John: Cousin—I—I don't know—I leave it all to you. You do what you think is best.—I'm not myself today.

Bastard: All right, then, my lord. I'll be King for a day, then, shall I?

King John: Yes—yes—You're capable.—Just do what you can, cousin. I depend on you.

Bastard: I'll deal with it, my lord.

(The Bastard leaves.)

Act 5, Scene 2. *Prince Louis's camp at Saint Edmundsbury. Louis comes in with Salisbury, Pembroke, Bigot, Count Melun, and Soldiers.*

Louis (Handing a paper to Melun): Count Melun, make a copy of this, and give the original to our English friends. By this agreement we pledge our faith to each other.

Salisbury (Emotionally): My lord Prince, we will be true to our word.—But it hurts me deeply that it has come this—to take arms against English people on English soil. What a terrible time it is that France must come to England to right a wrong. From the bottom of my heart, I tell you, sir, I wish it were otherwise.

Louis: Lord Salisbury, you have a noble heart—a good heart. I understand how you and the other lords feel. Now lift up your spirits. What you seek will be delivered, and you will be rewarded handsomely for your service to France.

(Pandulph comes in.)

Louis: Ah, the good Cardinal—no doubt come to give his blessing to our noble cause.

Pandulph: Hail, Prince, obedient subject of the church! I've just spoken to King John.

Louis: Yes—and?

Pandulph: King John has reconciled himself with Rome. Therefore, I ask you to return to France.

Louis: Return to France? But you're the one who urged me to invade England.

Pandulph: Well, yes, but—

Louis: You spoke to my father and laid out all the reasons why we should invade.

Pandulph: Yes, my lord Prince, but that was then. Things have since changed. I've settled everything with King John.

Louis: I don't give a shit what you've settled with King John. The matter isn't settled with me. My forces already control half the country. I've claimed the crown. And now you come and tell me to forget it? You got what you wanted for the Pope, which is England back in your pocket, and now I'm supposed to go home—is that it? What do I owe the Pope? Who paid for this fucking army? I did! He didn't put up a single penny!

Pandulph: Oh, now, sir—

Louis: I've heard English people cheering when we marched into their towns! They're with us! And if you think I'm going to turn around and go home now that I've got the crown of England practically in my hands, you're crazy!

Pandulph: Oh, my good Prince, you are eager, you are sincere, but you are still young and inexperienced. This is a matter that must be put into perspective.

Louis: Perspective! Here's my perspective! I've got ten thousand soldiers out there who are ready to fight. If I tell them, never mind, we're not going to fight because the Pope's representative made a deal with King John, how does that make me look? I might as well be Prince of Penguin Island. Do you think we French have no pride or sense of honour?

(A trumpet sounds. The Bastard comes in, escorted by a French soldier.)

Soldier: My lord, an emissary from King John.

Louis: I remember you. You're—

Bastard: Sir Richard Plantagenet. King John sent me.

Louis: All right. Speak.

Bastard: You speak first, sir. What have you and Cardinal Pandulph decided to do?

Pandulph: I have asked the Prince to make peace, but he refuses.

Bastard: Good for him. You're a weasel, and you don't speak for King John. I do. *(To Louis)* King John is ready and able to smash every French skull on English soil. He will cut you into pieces and feed you to his hogs. He will ruin you. He will destroy you. He will descend upon you like an eagle and rip out your livers and spleens and cook your hearts for dinner. *(To the English lords)* And you, you traitors—you'll be slaughtered by your own families, and your servants will sleep in your beds, take all your money, and drink all the wine in your cellars, and then you'll be buried in a ditch, and dogs will piss on you.

Louis: That's enough. You came all this way to insult us? Fine. Go back to your King and tell him you put on a good show. But we are not impressed.

Pandulph: Um, please, if I might say a word.

Bastard: Pandulph, you're an asshole.

Louis: Save your breath, both of you. I don't care about words. This matter will be settled on the battlefield.

Bastard: That suits us fine. Whatever King John said to this guy, he wasn't serious. He never wanted any deal. He'll fight you, and it'll be death for all of you.

Louis: Brave words, sir, but that's all they are—words.

Bastard: The last word always belongs to the winner.—Goodbye.

(The Bastard leaves.)

Act 5, Scene 3. *On the battlefield. Trumpets and alarms. King John comes in with Hubert.*

King John: Hubert, what's happening?

Hubert: It's not going well for us. How do you feel, my lord?

King John: Sick.

(A Messenger comes in.)

Messenger: My lord, your kinsman Faulconbridge urges you to leave for your own safety. I'm supposed to report to him which way you intend to go.

King John: Tell him—to Swinstead—to the abbey. *[Author's note: Shakespeare got this from an erroneous source. There was no abbey at Swinstead. John probably went to Swineshead. But all texts leave it as Swinstead.]*

Messenger: Faulconbridge also has some good news for you, my lord. The French fleet bringing reinforcements got wrecked in a storm.

King John: Good—good—God, I feel so sick.—Hubert, help me.

(King John and Hubert leave one way, the Messenger the other.)

Act 5, Scene 4. *Elsewhere on the battlefield. Salisbury, Pembroke, and Bigot come in.*

Salisbury: The English forces are putting up a hell of a fight. I didn't think John had this many friends left.

Pembroke: We have to help rally the French. If they lose, we lose.

Salisbury: That bastard Faulconbridge is out there commanding.

Bigot: Not John?

Pembroke: John's sick. He had to leave the field.

(Count Melun staggers in, badly wounded.)

Melun: English lords!

Pembroke: Count Melun!—Easy, man.

Salisbury: God, he's hurt.—Melun, how bad is it?

Melun: I'm dying.—Listen to me—noble English.—You have been duped.

Salisbury: Duped? How?

Melun: Prince Louis—intends to have you executed—after he wins.

Pembroke: Executed! I don't believe it!

Melun: Would I lie to you?—I am dying.—Would I face God with a lie on my dying lips?—I owe you this favour.—My grandfather was English.—Now you do a favour for me.

Salisbury: Yes. Anything.

Melun: Put me in some sheltered place—so I have time to make my peace with God.

Bigot: Yes, yes.—Poor man.—You've saved our lives. God bless your soul.

Salisbury: Come. Quickly.

(The three Lords carry Melun out.)

Act 5, Scene 5. *Evening in Prince Louis's camp. Louis comes in with his Attendants.*

Louis: We did all right today. We drove the English back. If we can keep it going like this, we'll beat them.

(A Messenger comes in.)

Messenger: My lord Prince.

Louis: What's the news?

Messenger: Count Melun is dead. And the English lords have deserted us and gone back to John.

Louis: Damn!

Messenger: And our fleet, my lord—

Louis: Yes?

Messenger: It was wrecked on the shoals in a storm.

Louis: Damn! Damn! Damn!—If I had those reinforcements—damn! I never expected this.—Tell me, is it true John withdrew from the field?

Messenger: Yes, my lord, it's true.

Louis: All right, then. We'll keep a careful watch tonight. I'm going to be up early tomorrow—before sunrise. I must beat the English, with or without the fleet.

(They all leave.)

Act 5, Scene 6. *At night near Swinstead. The Bastard and Hubert come in slowly from opposite sides.*

Hubert: Who goes there? Speak or I'll shoot! *[Author's note: This better be a bow and arrow, because guns didn't exist yet.]*

Bastard: Don't shoot! Who are you?

Hubert: I am English.

Bastard: Hubert? Is that you?

Hubert: Yes. Who are you?

Bastard: Sir Richard Plantagenet.

Hubert: Oh, thank God! You had me scared to death, sir. I've been looking for you.

Bastard: What's happened?

Hubert: Bad news, sir. The King is terribly sick. He's at Swinstead Abbey. I think he's been poisoned by a monk.

Bastard: Oh, God. I shouldn't be at all surprised. All the monks were furious when I hit them up for money. But are you sure he was poisoned?

Hubert: It has to be. One of the monks gave him wine to drink, and he drank some first so the King wouldn't suspect anything. The monk died, but the King is still alive—just barely.

Bastard: Who's with him now?

Hubert: Why, sir, don't you know? The lords have come back—and they've got young Prince Henry with them.

Bastard: Henry!

Hubert: Yes. John's own son. And he asked John to pardon the lords, and he did.

Bastard: Hubert, I've lost half my men. We got caught on the flats when the tide came in. I just barely got out alive.

Hubert: Oh, bad luck, sir.

Bastard: Yes. But never mind. Take me to the King at once. I just hope he's still alive.

Hubert: Follow me. This way.

(They leave.)

Act 5, Scene 7. *Morning. The orchard at Swinstead Abbey. Prince Henry comes in with Salisbury and Bigot. (Henry is a young boy. Historically, he was nine years old at this time.)*

Prince Henry: He's very sick, isn't he? He's going to die, isn't he? He was raving last night.

Salisbury: It's all right, Prince.

(Pembroke comes in.)

Pembroke: He wants to come outside. He says it'll make him feel better.

Prince Henry: Please bring him

Bigot: I'll go.

(Bigot leaves.)

Prince Henry: How is he?

Pembroke: He's calmer. He even tried to sing.

Prince Henry: The swan sings before it dies. Isn't that so?

Salisbury: That's what they say. Now be brave, my young Prince. Remember that you were born to be King.

(King John is brought in by Bigot and set upon a chair.)

King John: Ahh—let me see the sky one more time.—I am burning inside.

(Prince Henry takes his hand.)

Prince Henry: Father, don't leave me.

King John: My boy. *(To the Lords)* Bring me cold. Bring me a winter wind. Conjure it up if you have to. I need cold. I am so hot inside.

(Prince Henry cries and hugs his father.)

Prince Henry: Father—

(The Bastard comes in, out of breath. [Optionally, Hubert is with him.])

Bastard: My lord. I came as soon as I could.

King John: Ahh—good cousin—Philip—Sir Richard.—I hang by a thread. You are just in time to close my eyes.

Bastard: My lord, the French forces are on the way. I lost half my men on the flats, but we can still fight—

(King John groans and dies.)

Salisbury: The King is dead.

Prince Henry: So even a King can die. Then I shall die, too, someday.

Bastard: I'm reading to keep fighting—for you, Prince, and for your father. They haven't beaten us yet. *(To the Lords)* All of you. We'll collect our forces. We'll drive the French into the Channel. We'll—

Salisbury: Sir Richard, don't you know? The fighting is over. Cardinal Pandulph came from the French only a half hour ago. He's inside now, resting.

Bastard: Never mind Pandulph. We'll bring the French to their knees and dictate the peace on our terms.

Salisbury: But it's already been settled.

Pembroke: Yes, Sir Richard. Neither side can win at this point. It's a stalemate.

Salisbury: Prince Louis left everything in the hands of Pandulph. All of us are in agreement. We'd like to have as many lords possible come today and witness the signing of a truce.—If you think that's appropriate.

(There is a very significant pause here, as the Bastard regards Prince Henry.)

Bastard (To Salisbury): I bow to your wisdom, sir. I agree. *(To Prince Henry)* We'll hold a funeral for your father.

Prince Henry: He wanted to be buried at Worcester.

Bastard: Then he shall be. And you, young Prince, shall be our new King.—King Henry. *(He kneels.)* To whom I pledge my everlasting loyalty.

(The other Lords kneel.)

Lords: Your loyal subjects.

(A pause, while Prince Henry regards them with tears in his eyes.)

Prince Henry (Timidly): I shall try to do my very best—if you will all help me.

(The Bastard holds the Prince's hand in a gesture of encouragement.)

Bastard: My lord, we are cousins. We are Plantagenets. And Plantagenet blood will always rise to the occasion. So be of good cheer, my lord. This wounded land will heal. England will be happy again. And as long as England is not divided against herself, she can never be conquered. God bless England. And God save the King.

Lords: God save the King.

END

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